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Chicago — May 14, 2024

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A Chicago priest has issued an apology for performing recently a blessing of a same-sex couple, which was filmed and posted on social media.

Vincentian Father Joseph S. Williams, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Chicago, said in a May 8 statement — which was issued by the Vincentians' Western Province — that he was "deeply sorry for any confusion and/or anger that this has caused, particularly for the People of God."

"The shape that the blessing took as portrayed in the video came about due to my attempt to provide for them a meaningful moment of God's grace," Williams said in the statement. "I wanted to do it well. A week or so after the fact, I viewed the video. I immediately realized that I had made a very poor decision in the words and visuals captured on the video."

In April, Williams had blessed a same-sex union between the Rev. Kelli Knight, a Methodist minister, and her partner Myah before the altar at St. Vincent. Knight afterwards posted a brief video and photographs of the blessing April 22 on her Instagram account, citygrrl76.



This is an undated screenshot of the altar at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Chicago. A Chicago priest in liturgical garb performed a blessing of a same-sex couple at the church, which was video-recorded and described on Instagram as "a blessing of our marriage." (OSV screenshot/Instagram)

The video pictured Knight, who spent 14 years as pastor of several Chicago-area United Methodist congregations, and her legal spouse both dressed in formal attire and standing with Father Williams in the sanctuary of St. Vincent.

As part of the blessing, Williams asked the pair, "Do you freely recommit yourselves to love each other as holy spouses and to live in peace and harmony together forever?"

"We do, I do," they each reply.

Although no ring exchange is depicted in the segment, Williams pronounced that "the rings they have exchanged are the sign of their fidelity and commitment. May they continue to prosper in your grace and blessing. We ask this through Christ our

Lord."

Although the Vatican declaration "Fiducia Supplicans" ("Supplicating Trust"), issued in December 2023, allowed for pastoral, non-liturgical blessings of couples in irregular unions — both same-sex couples and unmarried heterosexual couples — the text specifies that such blessings, "precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal ... should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them.

"Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding," the declaration states.

In the May 8 apology notice, the Vincentians said that Williams specifically "regrets the language of the blessing and the use of vestments and the church itself, which he now recognizes were a violation of the norms approved by the Church.

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"While Pope Francis in December formally approved the blessing of couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples, he specified that such blessings do not equate to a wedding and should not employ the clothing and gestures that accompany a wedding," the Vincentians stated.

They added that Williams stated "he performed the blessing after being approached by the couple and explained to them at the time it would merely be a blessing and not a wedding itself."

In a May 13 email to OSV News, Knight said she was "grateful for the Church's blessing of our marriage.

"It is unfortunate there are groups that oppose such blessings that put priests in positions to issue statements or apologies following such," Knight wrote. "My hope and prayer is that other priests will continue to be encouraged to extend this grace to other same-gender couples in the future."

According to the Vincentians, Williams said he found the experience "has been a valuable learning experience."